

me to lead these changes in a spirit of respect and gratitude for the military and its traditions.

Some things about America's Armed Forces must never change. In times of trouble and in times of peace, the men and women who wear the uniform are the military's greatest asset. Without your hard work and heroism, your discipline and personal courage, the finest of technologies cannot defend us.

Our NATO Allies have brought their own character and courage to the defense of liberty. We're cast together in a story of shared struggle and shared victory. Here, where three ships from England once passed on their way to Jamestown, we carry on the alliance that joined the old world and the new. We're allies, and we are friends. As long as we stand together, power will always be on the side of peace and freedom.

God bless the United States military. God bless NATO, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:25 a.m. outside the headquarters building of the NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. William F. Kernan, USA, NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, Commander in Chief, U.S. Joint Forces Command; Gen Henry H. Shelton, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Adm. Sir James F. Perowne, KBE, United Kingdom Navy, NATO Deputy Supreme Commander, Atlantic; and Rear Adm. Martin J. Mayer, USN, Deputy Commander in Chief, U.S. Joint Forces Command.

Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One

February 13, 2001

The President. Glad to see you all again. It's been a while since I've been able to emerge out of the—are you doing okay?

Tax Cut/Legislative Agenda

Q. We wondered what your thoughts were on the retail sales jumping seven-tenths of a percentage point last month, and does that still speak to the need for a tax cut?

The President. Oh, I think it's one good statistic amongst a sea of some pretty dismal statistics. I am concerned about the economy. I strongly believe the combination of

monetary policy, fiscal policy will help ease whatever economic pain is on the horizon. I'm obviously very pleased about those numbers and hope that other numbers bear out that piece of good news.

Q. Are you going to try anything beyond what you've done already to try to get Congress to move up? I know you oppose retroactive, but they still have to pass to pass it.

The President. No, we've got to get it through, and I understand that. It's just, you know, the calendar is what it is, and we'll work with the Congress to get all our bills moving as quickly as possible. They're in charge of the timeframe, and I believe we're going to get a good hearing on our pieces of legislation as quickly as possible. But it will take a while.

U.S.S. Greenville

Q. Are you concerned about the allegations from the Japanese that the crew of the *Greenville* stood by and did not offer assistance?

The President. I called the Prime Minister today. That's why I was 3 minutes late, on the on-time administration. [Laughter] But I spoke to Prime Minister Mori. I assured him that we will do everything we can to try to recover and find—find or recover the bodies. He did not bring up that allegation to me. I have yet to hear all the facts from Secretary Rumsfeld, and I look forward to what he has to say. I am—I did assure him—I apologized on behalf of the country.

Marc Rich Pardon

Q. Are you distracted at all by the furor over the Marc Rich pardon and the former President?

The President. Not at all.

Q. Not a distraction?

The President. Not at all. I will tell you one thing, just in terms of the former President. All the allegations that they took stuff off of Air Force One is simply not true, for example. But no, I'm not the—sit down; I'll come back.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

[At this point, the President left the press area. Later, he returned.]

The President. As promised. [Laughter]

Strategic Vision Reassessment

Q. [*Inaudible*—talked about modernizing the military a number of times. Should Members of Congress who are trying to promote their own program, like the F-22 or some of these older programs, should they be worried at this point?

The President. Well, I think they ought to wait until we have—the Secretary presents a strategic vision. I said during the campaign—as you know, Tom—I worry about defense spending based upon politics and not based upon a strategic vision. I said that again today. I said the strategy and the spending ought to follow. I don't think Members ought to worry about that. I think they ought to be pleased with that type of approach to budgeting.

Q. Will you be shutting down some major weapons programs?

The President. Let's wait until the review is finished.

President's Meetings With the Military

Q. Mr. President, as you've been talking to the soldiers and sailors the last couple of days, what kind of response do you feel like you've gotten? What have you learned from them?

The President. First of all, I think the men and women who wear the uniform respect the office of the Presidency, for which I'm grateful. I think they're just honored that the President would come and say hello.

I was taken aback by the—"taken aback" isn't the right word. I was—there was a lot of concern about overdeployments yesterday at Fort Stewart.

Q. About what?

The President. Overdeployments, it was on people's minds. I'm not surprised that was—talking about pay, and they were pleased to hear there were going to be some more pay increase coming. But there was a lot of talk about extended trips overseas. It's really not one trip; it's the multiple trips; and it's the time away from base, the training required.

You know, people are deployed to the Balkans. They go through training to prepare for the mission in the Balkans. They go to the Balkans. They then come back and have to be retrained for the mission that they used

to be a part of. And sometimes the training exercises are not at the base in which they're—you know, their main base. And so there was just a lot of time away from their homes, and that was a concern.

I was touched by the ceremony when I reviewed the troops, to look in the eyes of the men and women who wear the uniform. It's a pretty powerful feeling, and it reminded me that we need to be very judicious and careful about committing our troops.

And today's incident—they called me early this morning about the Blackhawks that had crashed over Oahu. And it was right on the heels of the visit when I got to see, stare people in the eyes, realize how precious the lives are of everybody, of course—the soldiers are my direct responsibility as the Commander in Chief.

It was just—it was a very necessary trip, because it really personalized the job. I take the responsibilities incredibly seriously. I do want to see more of the military, meet more of the troops. I want to see more of the missions. I get a much better feel for what's happening in different—specialties.

Q. [*Inaudible*—really respect the office. Did you get some feedback that they appreciate you or appreciate what you are going to do for the military?

The President. I think they've got high hopes for me and my administration. I felt like yesterday's statement, that first things first are the people who wear the uniform and that the first public statement I made since—or the first speech I gave on a military installation had to do with better pay and better housing and better medical care.

There is going to be—you know, redesigning the strategic vision of the military is going to take some time. But we must do it. There are going to be some tough choices to make, but that's why you get elected.

U.S.S. Greenville

Q. Mr. President, on the *Greenville*, U.S.S. *Greenville*, would you support a salvage effort?

The President. We've got an unmanned sub heading out there to determine exactly what the status is. I need to find the facts. I think we need to do what we need to do to get the bodies out of there, if they're there.

Q. You said you had apologized to Prime Minister Mori, but you got cut off.

The President. Oh, I'm sorry. Well, I did. I said I was—I apologized on behalf of our Nation for the accident that took place and the lives that are missing.

Q. Did he ask you to do anything or did he—

The President. He asked me to do everything I could—which we are doing—to find, to locate the missing folks.

Q. As a former military man yourself, sir, know the absolute preeminence of safety—every operation. Were you comfortable, as a former military officer that—were taken?

The President. John, I haven't seen the full briefing yet. And that's going to go up through the proper chain of command. I know the Secretary of Defense has asked that question and, once the facts have surfaced, I will—I'm sure it will be brought to my attention, and I'll be able to answer that question better after I hear the facts.

President's Upcoming Visit to Mexico

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Well, I'm looking forward to be with my friend Vicente Fox to make sure that he understands that when I say friends, that we'll be friends. I mean it. There will be a lot of discussions, a lot of issues. Trade is a big issue, energy a big issue, immigration a big issue. And I look forward to discussing them.

It's really a continuation of a chat we had in Dallas. He had been elected; I hadn't been. But we had stopped off in Dallas, had a chance to visit with him. I've known him from before, and I've got a good relationship with him. It's why I'm going to Mexico. I think it's going to be a good signal to the Mexicans and others in our hemisphere that the best foreign policy starts at home. We've got to have good relations in the hemisphere.

I assured the Prime Minister of Canada that my vision of the hemisphere goes both north and south. We had a really good visit, by the way. Chretien is a very interesting man, a down-to-earth fellow.

Mexico and California Energy Shortages

Q. He's the only politician who speaks out of one side of his mouth, and he's admitted

that, himself. [Laughter] Do you think a potential solution to California's energy crisis lies in Mexico?

The President. Could be. You know, you've been reading talk about, well, Mexico needs to import natural gas. But every mcf of newly discovered gas in our hemisphere helps the overall supply picture throughout the hemisphere. Now, that sounds obvious, but somehow people are writing that, "Well, you know, the idea of maybe working with Mexico to attract foreign capital, develop natural gas really won't help in the United States." Of course it will help in the United States. It means that there will be less exports from the United States to Mexico. There's an issue evolving right now in California about natural gas going from California to the Mexican powerplant. I don't know exactly what the status is. It's conceivable that that gas will be interrupted, and it will create, obviously, a problem for our neighbors to the south. But gas can flow both ways. And any gas down in Mexico that improves the Mexican situation will help America.

Secondly, the idea of—I am going to discuss this with the President, about improving the powerplants to be able to help additional power get into the western grid. That would obviously be farther west than where we're going to be. But yes, I think with an opportunity—potential.

Q. [Inaudible]—natural gas prices. Is there something the Government can do? Some people really need to—

The President. Yes, they are. We supported LIHEAP, of course. But what the natural gas price will end up doing is attracting more investment, more capital, more exploration, which we surely need. We've got a shortage of gas and a growing demand. That's why the price is where it is. The issue in the State of California, they didn't increase the supply of energy, but the demand for energy increased in a significant way. It turns out the Internet, while it created a brand new economy, also created a huge need for power. We need more power, pure and simple. That's part of the discussions with the President of Mexico will be, to determine whether or not there is the ability to jointly work on the ability to generate more power.

Investigation of Presidential Pardons

Q. Sir, I just wanted to follow up on the previous question. You had mentioned—you've often said, about your predecessor, that you want to look forward, and not the past. Do you think it's a good idea for Congress to be investigating pardons or for the Justice Department to do that? Or should they just let it go?

The President. I think it's time to move on. And——

Q. Will you ask Chairman——

The President. No, the Congress is going to what they're going to do. They've already started the process.

Q. What about your Attorney General?

The President. I haven't talked to the Attorney General about it. I read something about it today, but——

Q. He would consider——

Press Secretary Ari Fleischer. The Attorney General just simply said that he would look at what Congress was doing.

The President. Yes, I don't think—didn't investigate; he was responding to a congressional inquiry. You know, the Congress is going to do what they're going to do. My attitude is, you know, all this business about the transition—it's time to move on; it is. It's time to stay looking forward, and that's what I'm going to do.

Q. Are you concerned that there's an—the appearance of a quid pro quo with all of the money flowing into the Democratic coffers?

The President. That's up for the able journalists in America to determine.

Always a pleasure. Sorry we don't get to spend so much quality time like we used to in the campaign.

Baseball

Q. Are you warming up for opening day? It's only 6 weeks.

The President. Down in Houston? [Laughter]

Q. Are you going to work with Tony Williams to bring a ball team to Washington?

The President. You're not going to believe this. It was one of the first topics he brought up during our conversation—seriously. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:15 p.m. en route from Norfolk, VA, to Andrews Air Force Base, MD. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori of Japan; President Vicente Fox of Mexico; Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada; and Mayor Anthony A. Williams of the District of Columbia. The President also referred to LIHEAP, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on Departure for Charleston, West Virginia

February 14, 2001

Situation in the Middle East

Good morning. I strongly condemn the terrible act of violence in Israel this morning. I have called Prime Minister Barak to express my condolences to the families of the people killed and to all the Israeli people.

As I told the Prime Minister, the tragic cycle of violent action and reaction between Israel and the Palestinians, particularly the escalation this week, needs to stop. I'm urging all parties to do their utmost to end the violence.

We will continue to work with all parties to try to restore calm to the region.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:55 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion With Employers of National Guard Personnel and Reservists in Charleston

February 14, 2001

The President. The Secretary and I are thankful you all are here; very thankful that the good Senator from this great State has traveled with us. It's an honor to be in his presence. He is an eloquent spokesman on what's right about America, and a pretty darn good spokesman about what's needed in West Virginia, I might add. [Laughter]

I appreciate the newly elected Congresswoman as well, Shelley Moore, for being